

VZCZCXRO1723
PP RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHNEH
DE RUEHNE #0948/01 1320559
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 120559Z MAY 09
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6534
INFO RUCPDO/USDOC WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RHHJJPI/PACOM IDHS HONOLULU HI
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 1740
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 4666
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RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 2583
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 9487
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 3708
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 6351
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 8004
RHOVVKG/COMSEVENTHFLT
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 NEW DELHI 000948

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STATE FOR INR/MR

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STATE FOR SCA/PPD, PA/RRU

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USDOC FOR 4530/IEP/ANESA/OSA FOR BILL MURPHY

E.O. 12958:N/A

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SUBJECT: SPECIAL MEDIA REPORT: INDIAN MEDIA COVERAGE OF U.S.-
AFGHANISTAN-PAKISTAN TRILATERAL CONSULTATIONS MAY 6-7

SUMMARY: The U.S.-Afghanistan-Pakistan trilateral consultations in Washington May 6-7, featuring Presidents Obama, Karzai and Zardari, generated widespread coverage and media commentary in India.

Afghanistan President Karzai called for the U.S. military to stop the air attacks. Post-summit, Pakistani President Zardari said Islamabad has shifted an unspecified number of troops from its border with India to fight the Taliban, and said India is not a threat to Pakistan. There was near consensus in editorials that Zardari's remarks were an acknowledgement of President Obama's message that Pakistan's real threat was not from India, but from the Taliban. At the same time, Zardari's comments were seen as a bid to ward off U.S. pressure and ensure American aid.

THE TIMES OF INDIA said if there is one message that emerged from the summit, "it is that Washington intends to reverse years of benign indifference to Islamabad's equivocation on its role in the fight against the Taliban and al-Qaeda." THE HINDU said there was no doubt that Pakistan has been goaded by the U.S., but the real eye-opener for Pakistan was the Taliban's aggressive advance. THE HINDUSTAN TIMES and THE ASIAN AGE opined that unless Islamabad can be persuaded to cease supporting the Afghan Taliban, the U.S. war in Afghanistan could be a never-ending struggle. THE INDIAN EXPRESS editorialized that Zardari's comments on India may be in earnest, but "they have no impact on Pakistan's national security policy, hijacked long ago by the army." All in all, Washington is seen as sending a "clear and consistent" message that the Taliban, and not India, is Pakistan's enemy.

End summary.

-- INDIA WELCOMES PAKISTANI PRESIDENT'S REMARK ON INDIA-PAKISTAN RELATIONS

¶1. The Xinhua news agency reported that India Sunday welcomed Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari's remarks that India is not a threat to Islamabad, saying it is a positive step towards a peace process between the two neighbors. "It is a positive step. It looks to be a positive step towards the peace process. Pakistan should now concentrate only on Taliban militants who are a threat to world security," an Indian foreign ministry official said on condition of anonymity.

¶2. For the first time, a top Pakistani leader has said that India is not a threat to Pakistan, and that terrorists inside the country are the worst threat to Pakistan. "Well, I am already on record. I have never considered India a threat," the Pakistani president reportedly told an interviewer on the PBS news channel's popular "News hour With Jim Lehrer" in Washington Saturday.

¶3. "I have always considered India a neighbor, which we want to improve our relationship with. We have had some cold times and we have had some hard times with them. We have gone to war thrice, but democracies are always trying to improve relationships," he said.

"THE RIGHT MESSAGE" - THE TIMES OF INDIA

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¶3. The trilateral consultations and President Zardari's subsequent statements in Washington generated editorial comment in several important dailies. Following are excerpts from an editorial in the May 9 centrist, independent THE TIMES OF INDIA English daily: (BEGIN EXCERPTS) "In Washington, Pakistani president Asif Ali Zardari has faced a different kind of heat. If there is one message that has emerged with stark clarity from the tri-party talks...it is that Washington intends to reverse years of benign indifference to Islamabad's equivocation on its role in the fight against the Taliban and al-Qaeda.... There are clear signs that the Obama administration does not mean to ease up.

¶4. The most revealing of these are the controls placed on aid to Pakistan, routing it through a system of accountability that will make it difficult for Islamabad to misuse it.... Washington's message has been clear and consistent; it is the Taliban, not India, which is the enemy.... It is as much in New Delhi's interests as in Washington's to ensure that the Pakistani state remains a viable proposition." (END EXCERPTS)

"TALKING TO PAKISTAN, ASAP" - THE HINDU

¶5. Excerpt from an editorial in May 9 South India based, leftist influenced THE HINDU English daily: (BEGIN EXCERPT): "For the first time the Pakistani Army appears to be conceding that India does not pose as much a threat to national security as the militant groups it nurtured to fight proxy wars in Afghanistan and Kashmir. True, it has been goaded into this by the United States. But the Taliban's aggressive advance into the North-West Frontier Province was an eye-opener for the Pakistani people; domestic public alarm played an important role in the decision by the government and army to go for all-out action against the Taliban.

¶6. India's national security establishment continues to nurture some nostalgia for the Pervez Musharraf years. The former military ruler is still regarded in some Indian circles as the Pakistani leader with whom New Delhi was able to deal best. No doubt, big leaps were made in relations between the two countries during his time, but as President Zardari has correctly pointed out, no democratic government in Pakistan has ever gone to war with India. The ruling

Pakistan People's Party has a relatively progressive vision for relations with India, and New Delhi must get down to work on this after the elections." (END EXCERPT)

"HEAR THE SOUND EFFECTS OF THE AF-PAK DRAMA" - HINDUSTAN TIMES

¶17. Excerpt from an editorial in May 9 nationally circulating centrist THE HINDUSTAN TIMES English daily: (BEGIN EXCERPT) Barack Obama may be the latest US President to host the rulers of Afghanistan and Pakistan, but the ghost at the banquet is surely India. The reason is simple: Pakistan is unwilling to cease supporting the Afghan Taliban, so long as it believes any other regime in Kabul will be too friendly to India. And unless Islamabad can be persuaded otherwise, the US war in Afghanistan could be a never-ending struggle.

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¶18. At the present time, however, the Af-Pak drama is unfolding in a manner favorable to New Delhi. The most important development is that Pakistan is showing signs of recognizing that its own creation, the Taliban, and not India is its true threat. A meatier sign is the Pakistani military's belated offensive in Swat valley and the government's declaration that it is no longer in the ceasefire business. But India needs to remain guarded in its response. Pakistan showed reluctance to take on the Taliban until prodded by the US. The Taliban continue to command much support and admiration within the Pakistani military. It will take many more offensives, before it can be said the generals in Rawalpindi have turned a corner.

¶19. As the U.S. tightens the thumbscrews on Pakistan, Washington will be tempted to extract a squawk or two out of India just to keep Islamabad happy. The odd line about Kashmir or troop withdrawals can be ignored. What the US will need to understand is that, first, it is unclear who in Islamabad will be a credible interlocutor for India. Second, in the present circumstance, overt US pressure will undermine the legitimacy of any Pakistani negotiator even more than it will an Indian one. (END EXCERPT)

"AFPAK: CAN U.S. SHIFT MINDSETS?" - ASIAN AGE

¶10. Excerpts from an editorial in May 9 nationally circulating, centrist THE ASIAN AGE English daily: (BEGIN EXCERPTS) Earnestness was at a premium in US President Barack Obama's trilateral meeting in Washington earlier this week...but it is doubtful if this automatically translates to hope. This is chiefly on account of the record. The President of the United States has now twice held trilateral meetings with the Presidents of Pakistan and Afghanistan in a bid to solve the problem of extremism and to deal a body blow to Al Qaeda and its local associates, especially the Taliban....

¶11. We should, then, keep in mind that one of the most difficult security issues of our times is being sought to be addressed by leaders who may not be on the best wavelength with one another, although they are mindful of the nature and the magnitude of the problem they face. This was evident at this week's trilateral.

¶12. America has now offered Afghanistan and Pakistan military and civilian aid with a view to boosting both counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency efforts. The first aims at military operations against militants and their bases and networks. The second hopes to wean the civilian population away from extremism and militancy by offering social and economic opportunities. This, in fact, is the way to go. The problem is that Pakistan will collect U.S. aid and may even fight the insurgents for a time, given how difficult the problem has grown in large swathes of the country.

¶13. However, history shows that the Pakistan Army has no issue with the extremists attacking Afghanistan from launch

pads inside Pakistan. This in fact is the fundamental cause of discord between Kabul and Islamabad. The U.S. knows this too. The success of its policy and of three-way summits will critically depend on whether Washington can get Islamabad to

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reverse this trend. (END EXCERPTS)

"A NEW ROAD?" - INDIAN EXPRESS

¶14. Excerpts from an editorial in May 9 nationally circulating centrist English daily INDIAN EXPRESS: (BEGIN EXCERPTS): "In asserting that he never considered India a threat, Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari may be entirely truthful. The problem, however, is not with Zardari. His convictions, right or wrong, have no impact on Pakistan's national security policy, hijacked long ago by the army. Whether it is formally in charge of Pakistan's government or not, the army has always had the last word on Islamabad's relations with New Delhi and Kabul, owned the nation's nuclear arsenal, and controlled its intelligence agencies.

¶15. In demanding that Zardari recognize that the existential threat to Pakistan does not come from India but the Taliban, the US Congress and the media were preaching to the converted. Zardari, whose wife and former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto was killed by extremists last year, did not need Americans to remind him of where the mortal threat to Pakistan comes from.... Pakistan's entrenched reluctance to reconciliation with India and enduring support to the militant groups come from the same source - the army....

¶16. New Delhi must consider the possibility that Pakistan may be on a road it has not traveled before. The next government in New Delhi, then, must be fully prepared to respond quickly and creatively to the new conditions next door. To prevent the Pakistan army from wriggling out of the war it does not want to wage, New Delhi must not only engage the Obama administration but also sustain substantive contacts with both Zardari and Sharif."
BURLEIGH